DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 063 RC 021 392

AUTHOR Ringer, Martin
TITLE Developing a Profession: A Preliminary Analysis of the Need for University Based Training for Adventure Therapists in Australia.
PUB DATE 1996-09-00
NOTE 8p.; In: Spawning New Ideas: A Cycle of Discovery; see RC 021 376.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adventure Education; College Programs; Course Content; *Educational Needs; Experiential Learning; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Needs Assessment; *Professional Education; *Therapists
IDENTIFIERS *Adventure Therapy; *Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes research to ascertain the need for university-based courses in adventure therapy in Australia. Three main sources of data were examined: questionnaires; a literature review; and anecdotal data such as unstructured interviews, personal conversations, and e-mail. Questionnaires were completed by 25 persons: 19 Australians and 6 from other countries. Results from a review of the literature and anecdotal data show the wide diversity of goals and techniques within the adventure therapy field and the need for adventure therapists to develop a coherent set of theoretical principles. Other results indicate that a university level course should address: (1) requisite skills in group work, counseling, therapy, self-management, and working with other cultures; (2) requisite knowledge (group dynamics, systems theory and psychology, experiential learning, psychological safety, technical outdoor adventure skills); (3) attitudes and values; (4) academic level; (5) prerequisites; (6) associated professions; (7) requisite learning process (didactic learning, research, internships, lectures, workshops, field experience); and (8) requisite assessment methods. Only one specific adventure therapy degree program was identified in the English-speaking world, although courses and study opportunities in adventure therapy were found in related fields. The existing provision of university-based adventure therapy courses in Australia and the United States appears to be inadequate, and more study is needed to identify the nature and scope of the need. (SAS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 416 063

DEVELOPING A PROFESSION: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE NEED FOR UNIVERSITY BASED TRAINING FOR ADVENTURE THERAPISTS IN AUSTRALIA

Martin Ringer
PO Box 906, Subiaco, Perth, Western Australia 6008. e-mail: m.ringer@cowan.edu.au

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

B. Baker

1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

RC 021 392

DEVELOPING A PROFESSION: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE NEED FOR UNIVERSITY BASED TRAINING FOR ADVENTURE THERAPISTS IN AUSTRALIA

Martin Ringer
PO Box 906, Subiaco, Perth, Western Australia 6008. e-mail: m.ringer@cowan.edu.au

Abstract
This workshop is intended to be of interest to adventure therapy practitioners, researchers, educators, managers and persons who allocate adventure therapy program funding. The workshop is intended to further discussion on the need for and nature of university based training courses on adventure therapy. Although the written material below is derived from an Australian study, the workshop is intended to be relevant to all nationalities.

This brief paper is the summary of a 170-page report on the multi-faceted research that I conducted as a major project for a Masters degree in Education at Edith Cowan University; Perth, Western Australia. The primary purpose of this study was to obtain a tentative notion of the need for university based courses in adventure therapy for Australian adventure therapy practitioners. For the purposes of the study, adventure therapy was taken to be the strategic use of adventure activities with a primary focus on engendering lasting personal change in the participants. Other core aspects of adventure therapy were the existence of a small cooperative group, the existence of real or apparent risk and the application of experiential learning techniques. The study examined the nature and extent of the practice of adventure therapy in Australia as well as making some observations about the practice of adventure therapy in other countries.

Data were collected from the literature, through the administration of a survey questionnaire to 25 Australian and overseas research subjects and from anecdotal sources. Research subjects were both from Australia and from overseas. Adventure therapy was found to be a new field of endeavour in Australia. No single theoretical basis was found for adventure therapy and only one university course in adventure therapy was located throughout the English-speaking world. The study found that the provision of a postgraduate adventure therapy university course in Australia would be of benefit to practitioners, clients of adventure therapy programs and to the wider community. The study concluded that a full investigation into the viability of such a course would be warranted. Findings included suggestions on the desired skills, knowledge, attitudes and values to be included in a possible adventure therapy course, suggestions on entry level criteria, and suggestions on the preferred means of learning and means of assessment. These latter aspects of the study were seen to be of interest to persons in parts of the world other than just Australia. Persons who wish to obtain the full 170-page report should contact the author.

The Study

Data collection

Three main sources of data were used for the study. These were questionnaires, literature and anecdotal data such as unstructured interviews, personal conversations and Email. In conventional research terms, 25 "subjects" completed written questionnaires about the need for and the desired nature of university based training courses in adventure therapy. Australian respondents (19) were given a version of the questionnaire that included a question asking if they saw a need for such courses. Overseas respondents (6) were asked only about their perception of the nature of university courses in adventure therapy. Literature was obtained on many topics including adventure therapy, experiential education, psychotherapy, family therapy and systemic human change. The thesis bibliography lists all literature reviewed. Anecdotal data was obtained from Email (including the ADVTHE_L adventure therapy listserver), conversations and interviews that I held at conferences and workshops over a period of three years in New Zealand, Australia, the USA, Canada, and the UK. Some of the central findings of the research emerged originally from the anecdotal data and were later verified by the literature and the questionnaires. A further important factor in the research was my own background which involves over eight years as a practitioner and program manager in adventure based counseling and in adventure

RC 021392

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

therapy. My subsequent intensive studies in psychodynamic-based group work also sensitized me to the importance of small group process in adventure therapy. Methodology is discussed in more detail in the thesis document.

Results

I reviewed the literature about adventure therapy and found that:

1. The phrase "adventure therapy" is used to mean the intentional application of adventure and interpersonal techniques with the overt goal of positively influencing the participants' cognition, affect, behaviour and personality.
2. The purpose of adventure therapy is primarily to remedy dysfunction in the client although many programs are also involved in prevention.
3. Adventure therapy is primarily a group based modality although many programs used one-to-one therapeutic techniques and family therapy techniques.
4. Adventure therapy interventions are based on an integration of principles derived from psychology, sociology, education and other disciplines that inform the process of human change and learning.
5. The goals of each adventure therapy intervention are developed in response to client needs. Common goals include resocialisation, treating substance abuse, providing remedy for dysfunctional interaction with others, and improving clients' management of their own emotional and social lives.
6. "Adventure therapy" is not a coherent field of endeavour that is recognised by the general public or by people in the helping professions. Considerable diversity of opinion also exists among practitioners as to the nature of adventure therapy.
7. The central tenet of the practice of adventure therapy is that it involves the application of "adventure" in the service of "therapy" but each of the key terms, "adventure" and "therapy" is potentially ambiguous.
8. A further ambiguity lies in the way that adventure is integrated with therapy to form a unique field of endeavour.

A "pointer" that emerged from the literature and from the anecdotal data was the need for adventure therapists to develop a coherent set of theoretical principles on which to base their work. The range of different program goals, client groups, funding schemes and outcomes sought by programs makes it impossible for the whole field to develop a single conceptual map, but there is a need at least for each program to have some articulated principles on which interventions are based. Given the diversity in the field of adventure therapy that became visible as the research progressed, it was already clear that it would be difficult to establish a uniform approach to educating and training adventure therapists. More information was sought from survey respondents, and the remainder of this report focuses primarily on survey findings that were substantiated by anecdotal data and by the literature.

Results from the survey

The range of respondents was very wide. Most were in their 30's, with two thirds being male. All but three had completed at least one university qualification and over half had Masters degrees or higher. Overseas respondents had higher qualifications than Australian respondents. The majority of degrees were in the fields of psychology, social services or education. Work experience of respondents was also very varied, ranging from a few months adventure experience to over 15 years of experience in a wide range of adventure therapy related roles.

All but two of the Australian respondents expressed unqualified support for a university based education/training course on adventure therapy. The two who qualified their support did so on the basis that there was already enough opportunity for practitioners to gain the requisite skills and knowledge and that there may not be anyone in Australia knowledgeable enough to run such a course. These two respondents already have an active role in training adventure therapists in Australia and hence they may have a sense of "plenty" that was not shared by other respondents.

The questionnaire was structured to elicit information from the respondents about their view of the essential elements of a university course in adventure therapy. The results of the survey corresponded

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

closely with both anecdotal data and with much of the data derived from the literature. Core aspects of any course were seen to be:

a) Requisite skills;
b) Requisite knowledge;
c) Attitudes and values associated with the course;
d) The academic level at which a course would be conducted;
e) Prerequisites; i.e. entry level experience and entry level qualifications;
f) The choice of a profession or professions with which to associate a qualification in adventure therapy;
g) Requisite learning processes;
h) Requisite assessment methods.

Research findings on each of these aspects of course design are presented below.

Requisite Skills

Literature, anecdotal data and survey results identified that adventure therapy practitioners required a wide range of skills including skills in technical activities, group work, counselling and interpersonal communication, therapy, and in a broad category of other topics. Technical activity skills have been omitted from this brief review because they are most fully catered for in other studies - as referenced in the thesis document.

Group work skills

Overseas and Australian respondents stated the importance of group work skills for adventure therapists and emphasis was given in the literature to the importance of group work skills in the running of therapeutic group process. The principles of small group process were found to be primarily independent of the particular theories of human change that were being applied.

Counselling skills

Similar emphasis was placed by survey respondents on counselling as was placed on group process. Much of the interaction that occurs during adventure therapy programs is in one-to-one situations and accordingly counselling skills are important. The principles of counselling depend on the particular theoretical orientation adopted by the practitioner and program. These orientations range from behaviourist-based to existential- and humanist-based. Some aspects of counselling such as developing rapport and empathy with the client were independent of the view of human change processes that is adopted. Any course for adventure therapy practitioners would need to equip practitioners with the generic skills in developing rapport and empathy as well as familiarising participants with the range of schools of counselling that is utilised by adventure therapy programs. Interpersonal skills other than counselling were seen to be of moderate importance by survey respondents. Mention was made of the need for adventure therapy practitioners to communicate effectively with other practitioners and with parents, other educators and with the general public. Given that adventure therapy is not a well known discipline, practitioners need to be able to communicate effectively about the nature of their work.

Therapy skills

Skills in therapy are also important. Nearly half of the survey respondents indicated that therapy skills should be taught in a course on adventure therapy. In particular brief therapy, psychoanalysis and the use of metaphors were suggested. The literature suggested that a wide range of "schools" of therapy were employed by adventure therapy practitioners. (For a more detailed analysis of "schools of therapy" see the thesis document.) The most appropriate approach depends in part on the nature of the clients' presenting problems. Most commonly mentioned forms of psychotherapy utilised tended to be those based on systemic or cognitive-behavioural approaches and hence these two broad approaches should be learned by trainee adventure therapy practitioners. There appeared to be less call for existential and psychodynamic approaches although the broad principles of empathy and small group process that were derived from psychodynamic psychotherapy would be essential elements of any adventure therapy course.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Other skills required by adventure therapy practitioners

Many clients of adventure therapy programs are highly dysfunctional young persons whose behaviour often challenges the self composure of adventure therapists. Psychological safety is a prerequisite for therapeutic effectiveness in most forms of therapy. The maintenance of psychological safety in groups requires that group leaders be aware of and manage their own anxiety and projections even when under strong disruptive influences created by seriously dysfunctional clients. For this reason, highly developed skills in self management are important. Overseas respondents stated the need for adventure therapists to be competent in working with persons from other cultures. Although no Australian respondents identified this need, many of the participants in Australian adventure therapy programs for young offenders are Australian Aboriginals or recent immigrants who use English as a second language.

Requisite Knowledge

Few respondents to the survey demonstrated a willingness to offer opinions about the requisite knowledge for adventure therapists. Their reticence may have been in part due to the lack of a consensually held body of knowledge about the theory of adventure therapy. Many responses indicated that adventure therapy practitioners would need to be familiar with whatever theory was associated with a particular adventure therapy program. Groups of responses indicated the perceived importance of:

a) Group process, group dynamics and small group therapeutic processes;
b) Counselling, adventure based counselling and interpersonal interaction;
c) Therapy and psychotherapy;
d) Systems theory and systems psychology;
e) Experiential learning;
f) Self management and psychological safety;
g) Technical outdoor adventure.

A further important topic area is the principles of human change that underpin the schools of psychotherapy used by adventure therapists. This was the most challenging part of the study to summarise and in fact the literature review and anecdotal data provided a much fuller picture of requisite knowledge than did the survey questionnaire.

Attitudes and Values Associated with a Course in Adventure Therapy

Some doubt was expressed by survey respondents that attitudes could or should be "taught" in a training course for adventure therapists. Codes of behaviour in the helping professions are all value-based and so the research included an assessment of the range of attitudes and values that were seen to be important by adventure therapists. The major theme that emerged in the research on requisite values for adventure therapists was the need for practitioners to be aware of the values that they already held and to have a willingness to avoid imposing those values on others - particularly those of other cultures.

Academic Level at which a University Course in Adventure Therapy should be Conducted

The academic level at which a course should be conducted would depend on the course content, the previous experience and qualifications of students and on the purpose of the course. Most Australian respondents suggested a postgraduate qualification, either at diploma or masters degree level. Overseas respondents favoured masters degree level.

Course Prerequisites: Entry Level Experience and Entry Level Qualifications

In keeping with the view that a qualification in adventure therapy should be at a postgraduate level, most respondents suggested that entry to such a course should require a prior university qualification. Practical experience in adventure work was also suggested. The particular pre-requisites for a degree or diploma in adventure therapy would depend on the content of the course offered. Pre requisites would need to be set so that students had adequate prior knowledge to enable them to engage satisfactorily with the course material.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Prerequisite experience in three areas was seen to be important. These areas were: a) Outdoor adventure experience; b) experience in working in therapeutic settings and c) broad life experience. A further pre-requisite recommended was maturity.

Professions with which to Associate a Qualification in Adventure Therapy
Psychology was the most common recommendation for a discipline with which to associate a university qualification in adventure therapy, although many survey respondents suggested a multi - disciplinary approach. A core issue that would need to be addressed by providers of university courses in adventure therapy would be gaining a balance between the practical outdoor skill and knowledge requirements of graduates and the therapeutic skill and knowledge required. Most academic credit systems tend to follow linear hierarchical paths so that in any line of study a student would need to complete an undergraduate degree in that discipline or in a related topic area before being granted entry into a postgraduate level qualification. If a postgraduate course in adventure therapy was offered in a discipline such as psychology which had strict linear study paths, only those who had completed an undergraduate degree in psychology would be granted entry. This limitation would exclude over half of the Australian respondents to the survey questionnaire - and hence probably over half of all potential students - from entry to the course.

Requisite Learning Processes
Emphasis should be placed on experiential learning in the education and training of adventure therapists. There is also an important place also for didactic learning and for academic research. Individual coaching and professional development are further useful learning processes. Practical means of integrating these approaches would be a combination of internships, lectures, workshops, supervised field experience and academic research.

Requisite Assessment Methods.
Multiple perspectives and approaches were recommended for assessment of student learning. Experiential learning includes the provision of assessment and review as an integral part of the learning process. This assessment and review could be utilised as a part of the formal assessment of student learning. Assessment should be conducted on the students' ability to conduct practical adventure therapy experiences, to demonstrate an understanding of the theory, to demonstrate the personal qualities required of adventure therapists and to conduct adequate research. Assessment should include feedback from multiple sources such as other students, clients, field supervisors, program staff clients and lecturers.

Extent to which Existing Courses Meet the Perceived Need
Only one specific adventure therapy degree course in the English-peaking world was identified by the research. This was the Masters of Psychology (adventure therapy) offered by Georgia College in the USA. Other study options in the USA were identified that would enable students to conduct research in adventure therapy as a part of other disciplines such as social work. In Australia one unit in adventure-based counselling was identified and two other study opportunities were identified that would enable students to conduct studies or research on adventure therapy in the context of education or outdoor education study programs.

The level of provision of university level study opportunities in adventure therapy in Australia does not meet the level of need identified by the research. No specialist university course is offered that provides the type of course content and learning processes identified by the research as meeting the special requirements of adventure therapy practitioners. The research identified a potential opportunity for the establishment of a university level course in adventure therapy in Australia although no accurate assessment of the viability of such a course was conducted. A full needs analysis would need to be conducted prior to establishing such a course.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Conclusion

There appears to be inadequate existing provision of university based adventure therapy courses in Australia and in the USA. A full investigation and more rigorous study than the one described in this study may be warranted to more clearly identify the nature and scope of the need.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE